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AMERICAN INFLUENCE AS AFFECTED BY PREPAREDNESS

BY W. MORGAN SHUSTER,

President, The Century Company, New York City.

Wars in the future will not be made by one power against another. We have passed that stage. It will be groups of powers against other groups of powers or against a single nation. And with what group do we stand, if you please? Are we a fair-haired child walking alone in an alley where thugs infest the corners? Are we under some divine protection which makes it unnecessary for us to take care of ourselves? Are we so good and so pure that everyone respects us?

I am for preparedness in this country, yet I certainly would resent the imputation of being a jingo. I have made speeches for preparedness because I believe it is the biggest and most vital issue for the American nation today. I do not think there is a single domestic question, nor a single international question, nor any other issue which even approximates in its importance to the American people the matter of their ability to defend themselves in the near future.

If I were a preacher and wanted to talk about extending our good influence to other parts of the world; about beating the unruly savage over the head in this land and in that; about carrying the ideals of American civilization to this place and to that, then I should urge upon you a very much more powerful system of preparedness, an aggressive preparedness; but I deem that to be unnecessary, inadvisable, and impracticable as we are situated today.

I mean by preparedness, and I hope no one who speaks in favor of it means anything else, only preparedness to resist unwarranted aggression against our natural rights as a nation and as a people.

It would be a wonderful thing if some nation were so great and so good, so powerful and so wise that it might extend its civilization over the world by persuasion where possible, by force where necessary, and rejuvenate and purify all mankind. But I conceive such views to belong rather to dreamers than to practical people.

We have had one such dreamer in the last one hundred and forty years. Some say we have another, but I do not want to see one arise in this country, because dreamers may have their work to do, but they cannot be safe advisers for vast numbers of people, for one hundred millions of people whose welfare, whose duty to themselves must be based upon more practical lines.

We have a duty and a high duty in this world and we have failed in it sometimes in the past. We have on some occasions acted the bully, in an international sense; with not quite so much bloodshed as in some cases where other nations have acted as bullies, but we have been guilty to some extent. And that is the thing which throws doubt into my mind, and that is why I cannot sit, convinced that my own country and my own people and I, as a unit in it, are today risking by their apathy the loss of everything that they consider dear, without feeling that those who call themselves pacifists are a real danger to our country. I think they are wrong. I think they are sincere, most of them at least, but I think they are wrong about the American people, and if I did not think so I would not want to be a citizen of this land.

I am sure that the American people themselves do not necessarily associate power with tyranny and brutality, though I am sorry to say that some other nations seem to have pursued that line of logic. If I believed that for this nation to be strong in an international sense would mean that it would become a tyrant over smaller nations or larger ones where it could, I think I should willingly choose, so far as I am concerned, the alternative of weakness and unpreparedness. But if I believed that, I would not consider myself a good American or fit to be a member of the body politic which we call our nation.

I do think it is perfectly useless for any nation or for any people, to talk about good intentions, to talk about humane objects in the world unless there is the power to back them up. What do you think of an individual who talks of his purposes, when you know he is a weakling; when you know he is utterly unable to make good in anything he may say? Do you respect his motives? What suspicion enters your mind? That he is speaking of holy subjects and lofty motives because he dares not speak of any other? Now nations, just as individuals, are considered and are held in repute in the family of nations, and we are held in repute throughout the

world not by what we say or by what we propose to do, but by our power to do, as estimated in the minds of various cold-blooded and cynical gentlemen of many races and nationalities.

It does not make any difference whether we are convinced of our latent power when we shall be thoroughly aroused and the earth shall tremble with our passion. That may be of interest to us locally. No one can tell what a nation will do when it is aroused, but we can tell what a nation will do when it permits itself to get aroused in an international quarrel without due preparation of the most practical description. It will suffer the useless murder of thousands of its citizens. If it is not possible for the American people and nation of one hundred millions, roughly speaking, today, to be strong,—strong morally, strong physically and in a military and naval sense, without provoking among ourselves a suspicion that we are on the road to militarism, to jingoism, to imperialism, without provoking, in our own hearts, the suspicion that we are about to use that organized force, or are liable to use that organized force, to do wrong to other peoples, great or small, then I ask you in all sincerity what confidence may we have in ourselves? What confidence may we have in our moral purposes, whether we are prepared or unprepared, if we consider that with preparedness we would use that weapon merely for our own moral undoing? Or that we are so weak of fibre that because we have the power to strike a blow we would strike it brutally and in a cowardly manner and for aggressive purposes?

I do not believe it. But, after all, that is only argument. It is the only argument left to those of our fellow citizens who preach that battleships insure war and that preparedness for war brings it on. There is a half-truth in what they say. Certain kinds of preparedness, if you please, do bring on war and did bring it on in Europe, in my opinion.

To use a homely simile, you may go through a dangerous portion of the country about your business, quietly and unaggressively, and if there are people who attack wayfarers and journeyers and they see that you are armed they will probably wait for the next man to come by in the hope that he may not be armed. But through that same place you might go aggressively, swaggering and boasting of your ability to impose what you saw fit upon any one or in any place, and thus get into difficulties merely because you had irritated people

whose custom was more or less to prey upon the weak, but who never attacked the strong unless they were irritated up to that point. That form of preparedness, that form of military or naval power I should certainly hope never to see in this country.

I do not think a regular army of one hundred thousand or one hundred and fifty thousand men is enough in this country. But that is only a detail after all. It is the principle we must see; the result will follow.

I would be willing to cast my vote on this question for the judgment of the loyal men who have studied those problems, the officers of our army and navy (and I have known them for more than twenty years), than whom I do not believe more simple, loyal, sincere and unaggressive Americans live anywhere in this country.

I have no fears as a citizen of aggression or of the subversion of our civil institutions by the United States Army, whatever its size. They have stood for law and order and they have obeyed the orders, distasteful at times to their instincts, of civil authorities all over the globe, without ever considering their own welfare or their own risks; and their influence in the community, whatever they may be, is wholesome and good.

You come back into this country and you never see a soldier or an army officer. It is a positive treat to meet one. I have been in places where you could not throw a stick without hitting large numbers of them. But I do not believe in the theory that our institutions would be in any danger if we should have what some choose to call a large standing army; an increase of three or four army corps.

I see headlines in our papers to the effect that we have sent four thousand men into Mexico; and everybody is expected to get excited. I wonder what the staffs of the different sectors over in the European battle lines will think when they see that four thousand troops have been deemed of sufficient importance to be mentioned in the American newspapers?

It is an apathetic state which we are in after all; that is the real danger in this country; when the time comes, and there is a real crisis, in some ways there will be a very wonderful response in this country, and the only sickening part will be the reflection that ten times as much could have been done, if there had only been 10 per cent more of preparedness for it.

And we must come to know in this country that we have a duty and that duty is very clear and very simple. Our duty is first to maintain ourselves as a nation and as a people, and safeguard our institutions without injustice or aggression to others; and secondly, and I emphasize this secondly, to do what good we can in this world; I put things in this order, because nullities can never do any good and we must become a factor to be reckoned with before we can spread any influence, good or bad; before we can spread anything. Let us then be strong, first for our own sake, strong because we believe in ourselves, because we trust ourselves, and after that let us disseminate whatever good our prestige as a powerfully organized state may permit. Then, I think, we shall have been good Americans and shall have added to the peace and satisfaction of mankind.